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DOCTOR STRANGE

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STEPHEN STRANGE was a pre-eminent surgeon until a car accident damaged the nerves in his hands. His ego drove him to scour the globe for a magical cure. Instead, he found a mysterious wizard called the Ancient One, who taught him the mystic arts and opened his eyes to the magic behind reality. Seeking power to defeat Doctor Doom, who'd usurped the mantle of Sorcerer Supreme of Earth, Doctor Strange became Sorcerer Supreme of Asgard--only to find himself stranded there after Thor's death. The wary denizens of the Nine Realms call him...

DOCTOR STRANGE

Seeking to gain the trust of Sif, Strange enlisted the help of Thor's half sister Angela and went to Alfheim to investigate the discovery of a mysterious coffin containing a dark wizard named Vyrbodin--the grandson of Light Elf Queen Aelsa and the former assassination target of angelic Regent Idyl. The Light Elves demanded a proper burial, but Idyl and her daughter Rhialla enlisted Strange to ensure Vyrbodin was really dead first.

Strange attempted to open the coffin safely, but Vyrbodin woke and broke through Strange's stasis spell. When Vyrbodin attacked using an ancient strain of dark magic--and created a dark version of Rhialla to help him slaughter the Angels--Strange was forced to take drastic measures...

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MAGIC IS ALL ABOUT *CONTROL*, IN ALL OF ITS FORMS.

THE ELF-WIZARD *VYRBODIN*-- IT IS SUCH AN HONOR TO MEET YOU!

THE STORIES THEY TELL ARE OF A WIZARD SO WICKED THAT THE VERY *MOUNTAINS* TREMBLE AT THE MENTION OF HIS NAME!

THE NEOPHYTE MAGICIAN WILL WORK ON *ATTAINING* CONTROL.

THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS WILL WORK ON *MAINTAINING* CONTROL.

BUT FOR A SORCERER SUPREME, THE NEXT VITAL STEP ON THEIR JOURNEY IS *SURRENDERING* CONTROL.

THIS...IS WHEN THINGS GET SCARY.

FSHHAKK

I REMAIN UNIMPRESSED!

BUT MAGIC IS AT ITS MOST POTENT IN ITS PUREST FORM, AND THAT IS WHAT WE STRIVE FOR.

MY DARK DAUGHTER, TAKE HIS HANDS.

THOUGH THESE SMALL SURRENDERINGS ARE NOT WITHOUT THEIR RISK.

PAY MORE HEED TO *ME*, IMPOSTOR, FOR MY KNUCKLES GROW COLD.

HA! MY THANKS! YOU HAVE WARMED THEM!

TO WIT, THIS IS SO EXHILARATING THAT I AM NOT ALTOGETHER SURE THAT I AM IN MY RIGHT MIND.

OH, SORCERER, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ALL MY LIFE?

NO MERE *SKALD*, YOU! NO MERE *DILETTANTE!*

MAGIC SUFFUSES YOU! MAGIC IS WHAT YOU *ARE!*

KZZAK

HE'S RIGHT.

MY ATOMS BURN WITH MAGIC. MY CELLS ARE *ALIVE* WITH THE STUFF.

HE FALTERS, AND I PRESS FORWARD. HE WEAKENS, AND I GROW STRONGER. HE FAILS, AND I--

--AM ABOUT TO STEP INTO THE *TRAP* HE HAS SET.

CLEVER LITTLE ELF.

NOT CLEVER ENOUGH, ALAS!

BUT FEAR NOT! WHILE WE MAKE OUR ESCAPE, I GIVE TO YOU A PRESENT!

A PORTAL OPENS--

--AND I AM FORCED TO RECKON WITH A *DRAGON.*

SKREEE

ENJOY!

ANGELA, CAN YOU--

URRR

--CAN YOU DEAL WITH THIS?

NATURALLY.

AFTER EONS IN THAT COFFIN, I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED VYRBODIN TO BE A TAD RUSTY.

SMACK

A TAD *SLOW.*

INSTEAD, HE RECOGNIZED THE THIN ICE ON WHICH I HAD STEPPED AND INVITED ME DEEPER ONTO THE LAKE.

TO DRAW FURTHER ON THE BRACELETS OF STRIFE AND REGRET WOULD HAVE CAUSED IRREPARABLE DAMAGE TO MY VERY *SOUL.*

GNN!

HE IS *DANGEROUS* INDEED.

OF COURSE, SO AM I.

STAY!

STAY!

STRANGE, YOU HAVE RECOVERED?

THEN TRANSPORT THIS ADORABLE CREATURE BACK WHENCE IT CAME BEFORE I MAKE IT MY *PET.*

DOWN, DRAGON!

--BUT THE ***BRACELETS*** ARE A NECESSARY TOOL IF I AM TO FACE WHAT'S COMING AND SURVIVE.

I JUST HAVE TO GET USED TO THEIR EFFECTS, THAT'S ALL.

I CAN HANDLE IT.

WE HAVE TO GET TO HEVEN. ***REGENT IDYL*** NEEDS TO BE TOLD ABOUT VYRBODIN'S ESCAPE.

I DO NOT GIVE ADVICE, STRANGE.

OKAY.

MY COUNSEL IS NOT PART OF OUR CONTRACT.

I AM AWARE.

BUT IF I ***WERE*** TO GIVE ADVICE, I WOULD WARN AGAINST USING MAGICS THAT LEAVE YOU ***VULNERABLE.***

THANK YOU, ANGELA.

SHE'S RIGHT, OF COURSE--

AND MY SISTERS NEED TO BE INFORMED OF THEIR ***LOSS.***

YES. THEY DIED WELL.

I'M SURE THAT WILL BE A COMFORT TO THOSE WHO LOVED THEM.

SINCE THE ***BIFROST*** WAS DESTROYED, THE JOURNEY BETWEEN REALMS TAKES A LOT LONGER...

...FOR THOSE NOT ABLE TO CONJURE ***DIMENSIONAL PORTALS.***

THIS IS MY FIRST TIME IN ***HEVEN.***

IT IS NOT WHAT I HAD IMAGINED.

YOU WERE RAISED HERE, YES?

BORN IN ASGARD, RAISED IN HEVEN, EXILED TO THE ENDWORLDS BY *ODIN THE EVER-PETULANT.*

YOU HAVE LED AN INTERESTING LIFE.

HAVE I?

MY QUEEN!

DON'T CALL ME THAT. WHERE IS THE *ACTUAL* QUEEN? WHERE IS REGENT IDYL?

THE REGENT IS MEETING WITH THE *HIEROPHANTS* IN THE *TEMPLE OF THE ANCHORITES.* RHIALLA IS WITH HER.

RHIALLA? GOOD.

THE WARRIOR WHO ATTACKED YOU, WHO KILLED THOSE ANGELS-- YOU'RE SURE IT *WASN'T* RHIALLA? SHE LOOKED *A LOT* LIKE HER.

OH, SHE WAS IDENTICAL, ASIDE FROM THE PALLOR AND THE FACT THAT SHE HAD NO *WINGS.*

I HAVE KNOWN RHIALLA MY WHOLE LIFE. THIS DARK DAUGHTER IS *NOT* RHIALLA.

I DID MY RESEARCH ON THE *ANCHORITES.*

MALE ANGELS--A RARITY--WHO EXIST SOLELY TO PROPAGATE THE SPECIES, GUARDED ZEALOUSLY BY THE FEMALE ANGELS AND WATCHED OVER BY THE HIEROPHANTS.

THEY ARE BOTH ADORED AND PITIED, AND SPEND THEIR LIVES ON THEIR KNEES--I IMAGINE, PRAYING FOR THE SOULS OF ALL ANGELS EVERYWHERE.

I *IMAGINE*...BECAUSE ONLY ANGELS AND HIEROPHANTS ARE ABLE TO PHYSICALLY ***ENTER*** THE TEMPLE.

SO I MUST WAIT AND TRUST THAT ANGELA IS ***DIPLOMATIC*** ENOUGH TO BREAK THE NEWS WITH THE DELICACY THAT IS--

YOU IDIOT!

AH.

I *TOLD* YOU! I ***WARNED*** YOU!

REGENT IDYL--

OPEN THE COFFIN! CHOP OFF HIS HEAD! CLOSE THE COFFIN!

WAS THAT SO ***DIFFICULT*** TO COMPREHEND?

I FEAR THE--

APPARENTLY IT ***WAS,*** BECAUSE HE IS ALIVE AND FREE AND MORE ANGELS ARE DEAD BECAUSE OF HIM!

MOTHER.

THIS *OTHER* ME YOU SPOKE OF--WHAT DID VYRBODIN CALL HER?

HIS *DARK DAUGHTER.*

I DO NOT KNOW OF ANY DOPPELGANGER, CLONE OR EVIL TWIN THAT THIS COULD BE, UNLESS THERE IS SOMETHING MY MOTHER HAS NOT TOLD ME.

MOTHER?

YOU ARE MY ONLY CHILD, RHIALLA.

AS I THOUGHT. THERE IS NOTHING--

BUT...

BUT? MOTHER, WHAT SECRET ARE YOU KEEPING?

OH, RHIALLA--

ALL PARENTS KEEP SECRETS FROM THEIR CHILDREN. SUCH IS THE WAY OF THINGS.

GALLIPHERON. YOU KNOW OF ANGELA, OF COURSE, BUT ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE--

THE MORTAL SKALD. HOW INTERESTING.

IS THAT A *PILGRIMAGE SHROUD* UPON YOUR SHOULDERS, SORCERER?

IT IS.

FASCINATING.

GALLIPHERON, PLEASE INFORM YOUR FELLOW HIEROPHANTS THAT I HAVE BEEN CALLED AWAY ON URGENT--

FRET NOT--I WILL CONVEY YOUR DEEPEST REGRETS THAT YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND YET ANOTHER CONVERSATION ABOUT *ENERGY USAGE IN HEVEN.*

WAS--WAS THAT A *JOKE?*

OF A SORT.

FORGIVE ME. I AM UNUSED TO HIEROPHANTS WHO MAKE JOKES. I THOUGHT WIT WAS SOLELY AN *ANGELIC* TRAIT.

WE *ARE* A VERY FUNNY PEOPLE.

BUT GALLIPHERON IS NOT LIKE THE OTHERS, ANGELA. HE HAS SIDED WITH MY MOTHER ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION.

I FIND *WISDOM* TO BE MOST PERSUASIVE.

WHAT IS *GENUINELY* AMUSING IS HOW OFTEN YOU CONFLATE *PANIC* FOR *WISDOM*, MY FRIEND.

SOMETIME SOON, YOU WILL COUNT THE STEPS YOU HAVE TAKEN TOWARD *PROGRESS* AND *LASTING CHANGE*, AND YOU WILL RECKON YOURSELF WORTHY OF PRAISE.

I LOOK FORWARD TO THAT DAY, REGENT. I TRULY DO.

THE THRONE ROOM.

I DO NOT KNOW ***WHO*** OR ***WHAT*** THIS DARK DAUGHTER IS. I DO NOT KNOW HER PURPOSE OR HER CONNECTION TO VYRBODIN.

BUT LONG AGO, HE--HE ***ASKED*** FOR YOU, RHIALLA.

ASKED FOR ME?

I WAS AMONG THE ANGELS DISPATCHED TO RID THE TEN REALMS OF THE THREAT VYRBODIN POSED.

I DO NOT PRETEND TO UNDERSTAND THE MIND OF SOMEONE WHO WOULD WANT TO KILL CHILDREN--

--WHO WOULD WANT TO KILL ***EVERY*** CHILD IN ***ALL*** THE REALMS--

--AND MINE WAS NOT THE PLACE TO ASK.

I HAD A MISSION. WE ALL DID.

BUT MY SISTERS FELL.

"AND I WAS ALL THAT WAS LEFT.

"VYRBODIN SPOKE--OH, HOW HE LOVED TO SPEAK!--AND THROUGH MY GRIEF AND MY PAIN AND MY FURY, I HEARD HIM OFFER ME A *DEAL.*

"HE WOULD ALLOW HIMSELF TO BE DEFEATED IN THIS BATTLE, HE SAID, IN EXCHANGE FOR MY *FIRSTBORN CHILD--*

"--TO BE SURRENDERED TO HIM WHEN SHE REACHED *TEN YEARS OF AGE.*

"IN MY SELFISHNESS, I ACCEPTED HIS DEAL, AND I GLADLY STRUCK THE *KILLING BLOW--*

"--AND TRAPPED HIS BODY IN AN IRON COFFIN.

"I WOULD MAKE GOOD ON MY VOW, I THOUGHT, BUT I WOULD ALSO PREPARE MY FELLOW ANGELS TO *DISMEMBER HIM* UPON HIS RELEASE.

"BUT VYRBODIN'S MAGICS MADE THOSE MEMORIES SLIP FROM ME, EVEN AS I LEFT THE CAVES.

"THREE YEARS LATER, I GAVE BIRTH TO *YOU,* RHIALLA, AND AS THE YEARS PASSED, I BEGAN TO REMEMBER, BUT I...I..."

YOU COULDN'T BRING YOURSELF TO DO IT.

TO MY SHAME... NO.

YOU--YOU KNOWINGLY-- *WILLINGLY*-- BROKE YOUR CONTRACT?

I *HAD* TO. SURELY YOU MUST SEE THAT? I COULDN'T HAND YOU OVER TO *ANYONE*, LET ALONE SOMEONE LIKE *HIM!*

I LOVED YOU AND I LOVE YOU STILL, AND TO THAT LOVE, A CONTRACT IS BUT A WHISPER IN A HURRICANE.

BUT EVEN SO, IT WAS NOT AN EASY THING TO LIVE WITH.

WHEN YOU TURNED TEN AND I ACTIVELY, *PURPOSEFULLY*, BROKE MY CONTRACT...

...I SPENT THE NEXT THREE YEARS *TORTURING MYSELF.* YOU MIGHT EXPECT IT TO BECOME EASIER AS TIME WENT BY, BUT NO...

...THE CONSCIENCE IS A PERSISTENT ADVERSARY.

AND THEN THE DECISION WAS TAKEN OUT OF MY HANDS, BECAUSE ODIN BANISHED HEVEN, CUTTING US OFF FROM ALFHEIM FOREVER.

YOU HOPED.

I HOPED.

FOREVER CAME TO AN END, AND NOW VYRBODIN IS ALIVE ONCE AGAIN.

FORGIVE ME, REGENT IDYL. AS A MORTAL, I DON'T HAVE THE SAME... ***PRINCIPLES*** AS YOU.

BUT IT SEEMS TO ME THAT VYRBODIN SPARED YOU BECAUSE MAYBE HE RECOGNIZED THAT YOU WERE THE ANGEL WITH THE MOST ***LOVE*** IN HER HEART.

HE THEN GAVE YOU AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK-- TO GIVE UP A ***CHILD***-- KNOWING FULL WELL THAT YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DO IT.

VYRBODIN'S SCYTHE MAGIC IS GENERATED FROM THE ***LOST POTENTIAL*** OF A THING: AN IDEA, A MOMENT, A ***PERSON.***

HIS DARK DAUGHTER...IT'S WHO RHIALLA ***WOULD HAVE BEEN*** IF THE CONTRACT HAD BEEN HONORED.

SO ALL OF THIS WAS SO THAT VYRBODIN WOULD GET AN ***ANGEL*** ON HIS SIDE--ALBEIT A ***TWISTED*** ONE. BUT WHY?

SURELY THERE ARE EASIER WAYS FOR A WIZARD OF HIS POWER TO KILL ***CHILDREN?***

ARE THERE ANY CHILDREN ***HERE?***

IN HEVEN? NO, NOT AT THE MOMENT. WE ARE SOME YEARS AWAY FROM OUR NEXT *MATING SEASON.*

STRANGE? WHAT IS IT?

THERE'S STILL A WAY TO TAKE YOUR CHILDREN AWAY FROM YOU.

GO! GO NOW! I'LL RAISE THE ALARM!

THE ANCHORITES.

WE PASS GUARDS WHOSE MEMORIES HAVE BEEN STOLEN, BUT WE ARE TOO LATE.

I KNOW THAT, EVEN BEFORE A MYSTICAL BARRIER FORCES ME TO WAIT OUTSIDE WHILE ANGELA AND RHIALLA FLY ON.

I KNOW WHAT THEY'LL FIND.

SO DO THEY.

UHH...

GALLIPHERON!

THE...THE ANCHORITES...

I KNOW. WE KNOW.

THE ANCHORITES WERE NOT... THE *ONLY* TARGETS.

I'M NOT TOO LATE. I CAN'T BE TOO LATE.

BUT I AM.

THE PORTAL TAKES THEM AWAY, AND I'M LEFT WITH YET ANOTHER CORPSE OF SOMEONE I FAILED TO SAVE.

AND ALL I CAN DO IS LIE TO MYSELF AND VOW THAT THIS WILL NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.

WE HAVE A LOT IN COMMON, YOU KNOW.

DEVILISHLY GOOD-LOOKING, A *SCREAM* AT PARTIES AND WE'VE BOTH, IN A WAY, *MURDERED OUR MOTHERS.*

IF YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT, JUST KNOW THAT I'M...

...I'M *HERE* FOR YOU, AS ANY FATHER WOULD BE.

SHE WAS NOT MY MOTHER, AND YOU--

--YOU ARE *NOT* MY FATHER.

YOUR WORDS, THEY...THEY CUT LIKES KNIVES.

BUT I'M A FAST HEALER.

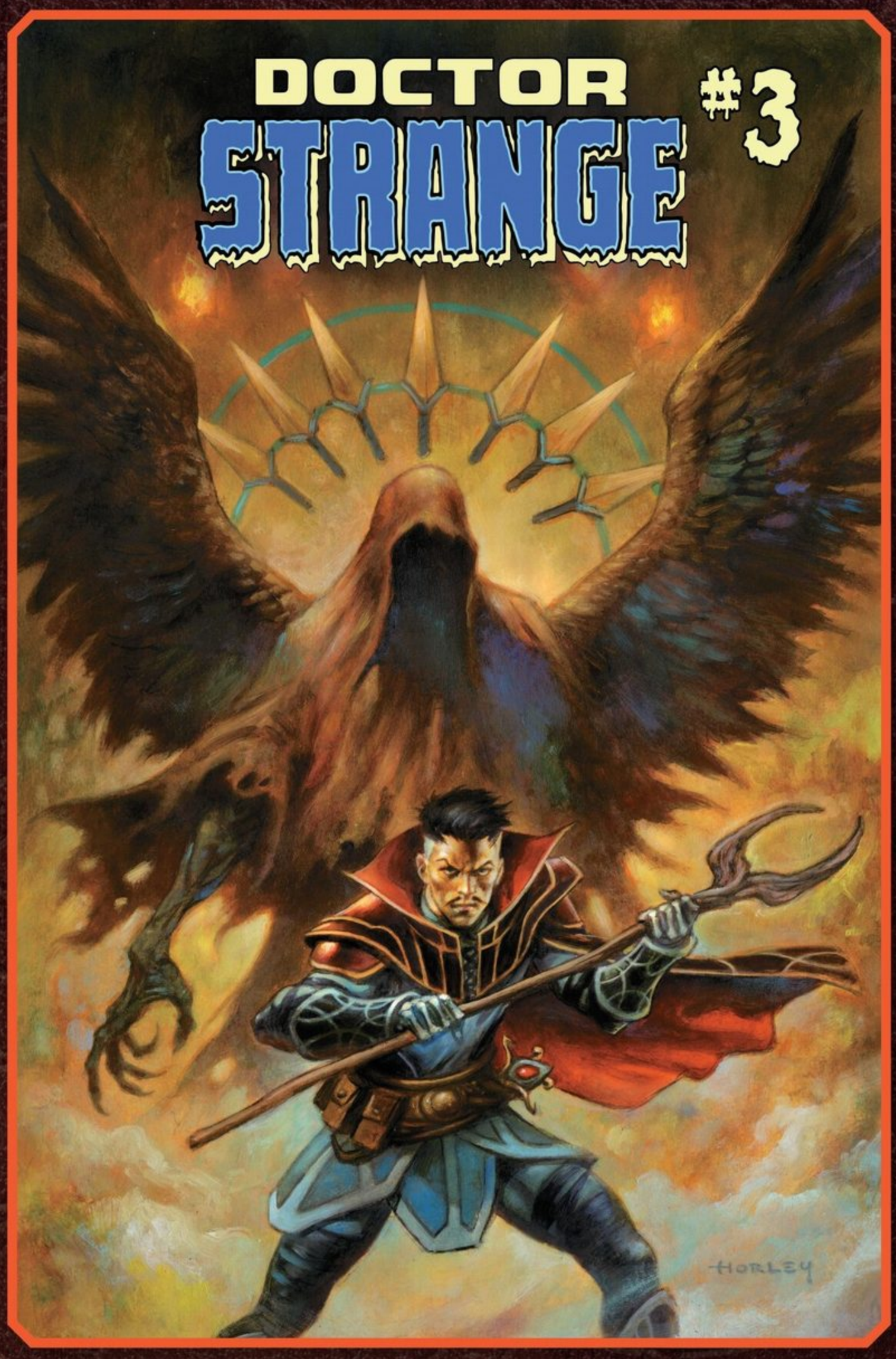
NOW! BEFORE WE KILL ALL THOSE BRATS, HOW ABOUT WE BRING *MY* MOTHER *BACK TO LIFE* SO I CAN *KILL HER ALL OVER AGAIN*, EH?

THAT SOUND LIKE FUN TO *YOU*, KIDDO?

TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT

Vyrbodin and Scythe Rhialla are in the wind, and Heven teeters on the brink of collapse after a devastating blow. Now Strange and Angela must defend Alfheim as a new threat rises...but can they find Vyrbodin as the final pieces of his twisted plan begin to take shape?



THE MAGIC CONTINUES THIS MONTH IN...

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